

**Stories of agency, advocacy and activism**

*Nathan Archer, University of Sheffield*

In recent years, early childhood education across the UK has experienced unprecedented policy attention and investment followed by policy neglect and divestment. Throughout this period, workforce policy has manifested (and continues to manifest) as numerous, competing demands on educators and on their professional identities.

In this presentation, I utilise my doctoral research to explore the tensions between the multiple and changing policy expectations on the early years workforce and the lived experiences of early educators. Drawing on practitioner narratives from an online focus group and life story interviews, I discuss participants' agentic responses to policy-driven expectations. Notably, practitioners in the study negotiated and mediated numerous policy discourses and demonstrated degrees of creative compliance and subversion. The research seeks to highlight educator hope and resistance and offers provocations for further discussion on the potential for collaborative agency.

**Nathan Archer** is a doctoral student in the School of Education, University of Sheffield.

He is a qualified Montessori early childhood and primary teacher. Nathan has worked in early childhood education for twenty years across the public, private and voluntary sectors both in and with schools and settings, for a local authority, and with two national early years organisations.

He is an associate tutor at the University of Sheffield and an associate of the charity Early Education.